

Burbot Fishing

In

Alaska



What is a Burbot?

Burbot (*Lota lota*) are members of the cod family, Gadidae. Burbot are the only freshwater species of the Gadidae family found in North America. Like other members of the cod family, burbot have white, mild-tasting flesh.



General Description

Burbot have flat heads with large mouths that contain several rows of small teeth. A barbel, or “chin whisker,” hangs from the lower jaw. They have long, thin bodies that taper towards the tail.



The dorsal and anal fins run from mid-body to the tail, and the tail of the burbot is rounded, rather than forked. Burbot appear to have smooth skin, but actually have near microscopic scales. Burbot also have a mottled brown to olive-black coloration.

Life History

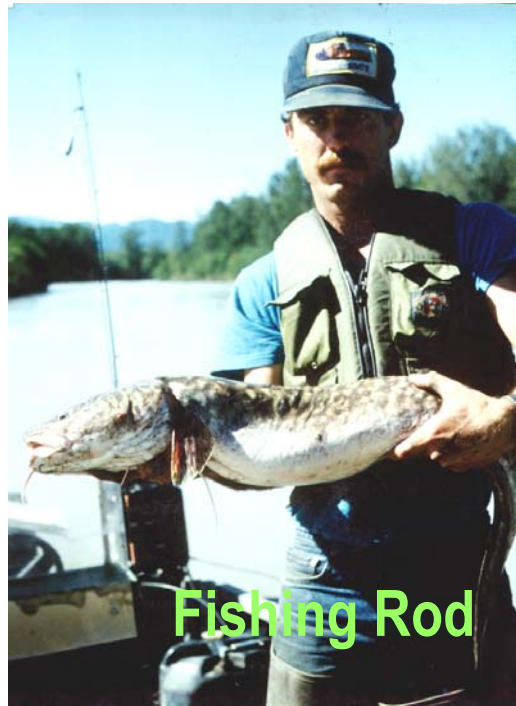
In Alaska, burbot are found in most large clear and glacial rivers and some lakes throughout the state except for offshore islands and most of southeastern Alaska.



Burbot are a slow-growing species that tend to be long-lived. They can live as long as 20 years. At age six or seven, a burbot can reach 18 inches, which is also the age Alaska burbot first spawn. The spawning period for burbot is during late winter (February to March) under the ice.

Burbot Fishing

Although burbot are not the most attractive fish, many anglers find them tasty to eat.



You can sport fish for burbot by a couple of methods. One is by using a fishing rod, the other is by set-line. A **set-line** is a line that is left unattended for no more than 24 hours and anchored in some fashion outside the water so that it can be checked. A set-line can have more than one hook set up on it.

What Tools Do You Need For Burbot Ice Fishing?



Snow Shovel:
For clearing the ice of snow before drilling the hole.



Ice Spud (tip)



Ice Spud: A long-handled ice chisel that is used for making a hole in the ice, or for preparing the ice for drilling a hole with an ice auger.



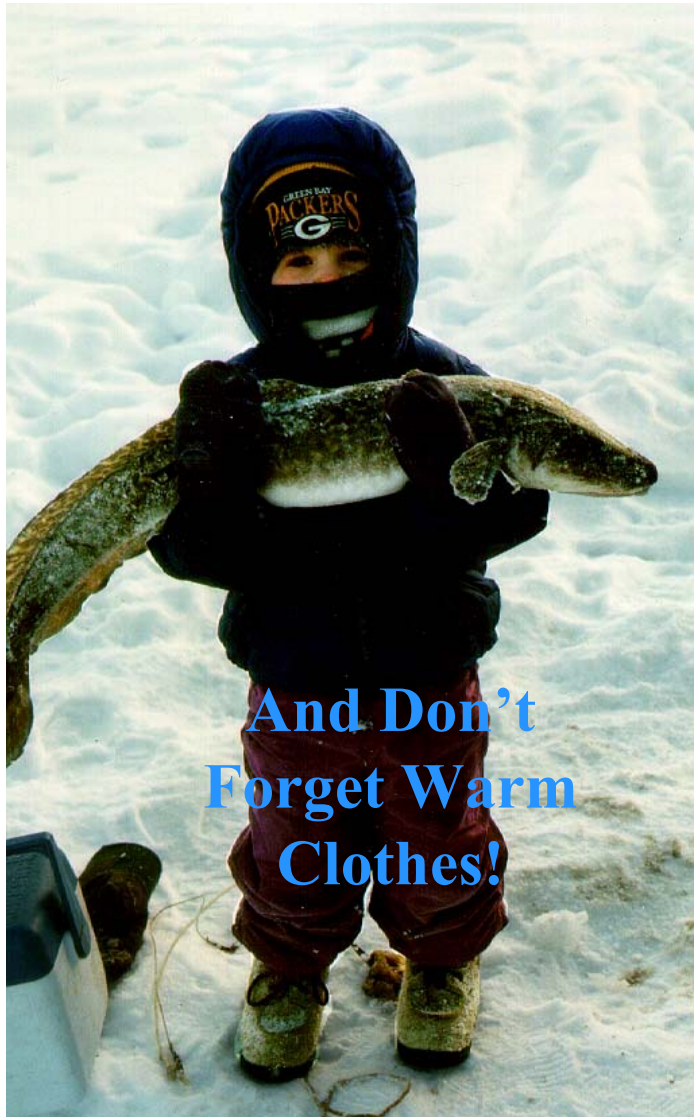
Ice Auger: For drilling holes in the ice. Choose between gas-powered or hand-driven (shown in picture.)

More Tools and Gear



Ice Skimmer: A wide ladle with holes drilled in the spoon that is used for scooping ice and slush out of the ice hole.

Towels or rags:
For wiping the slime off your hands after handling fish and bait. Better than wiping them on your pants or gloves.



**And Don't
Forget Warm
Clothes!**

Gear Specific to Burbot Set-Lines



Hooks – single hook with gap between shank and point larger than $\frac{3}{4}$ inches is the required size.

Sample hook set-ups that have different types of weights, hooks, trot line clips, and rope size.

Gaff or hooked pole – a pole or stick that has a hook at one end for reaching into the ice hole to pull up the line. (optional)



Braided nylon rope – that is $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{3}{16}$ inches thick and 50 to 100 pound test line works well.

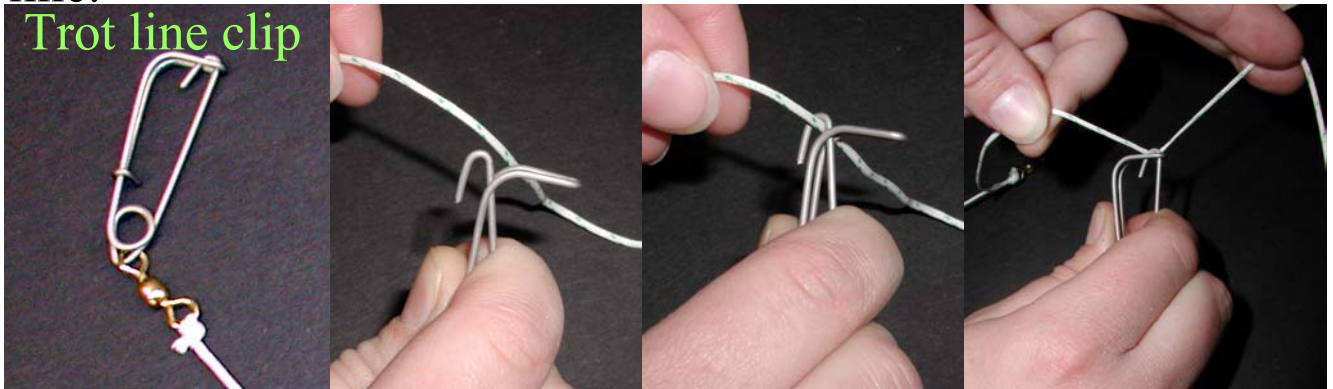


Weights – heavy enough to keep line on bottom of stream or lake bed.

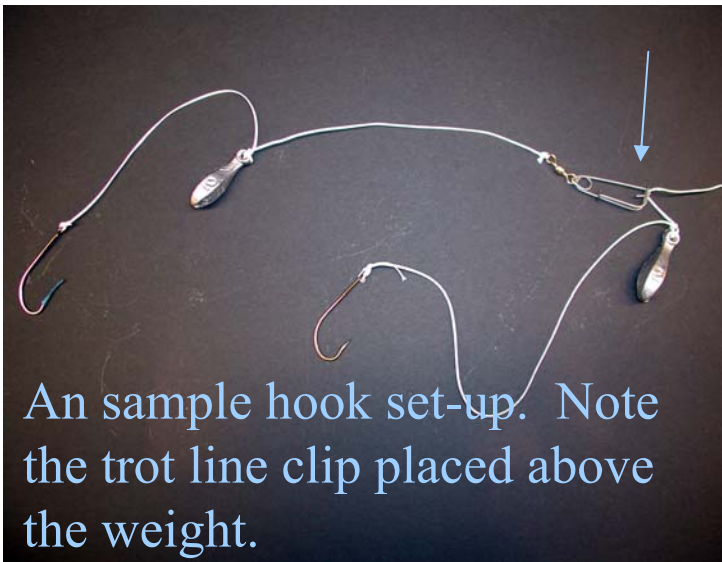


Steps to Making a Set-Line During Winter

It's best to prepare your hooks, line, and weights before going out. Below shows steps on how to use a trot line clip to attach a hook to your burbot set-line. Although not necessary, trot line clips make it easy to attach and remove hooks from a set-line.



Once you are at your site, clear the snow from the ice with a shovel before drilling a hole.



An sample hook set-up. Note the trot line clip placed above the weight.



Drill a hole in the ice using an ice auger.

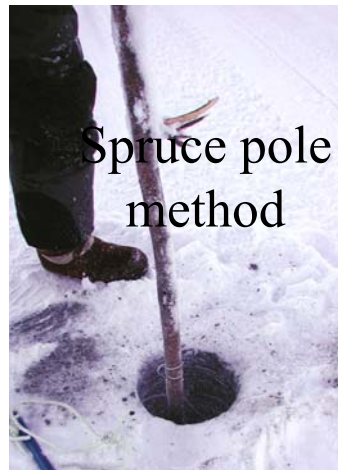
Use the ice skimmer to remove any ice and slush from the hole.



Prepare your pole or line with your set-line hooks. Make sure enough weight is on the line.



Lower the line into the hole and secure the end.



Some people use spruce poles to ensure the set-line is resting on the bottom. Others prefer to use a strong line with a heavy weight.

Make sure your name and address is attached to your set-line.

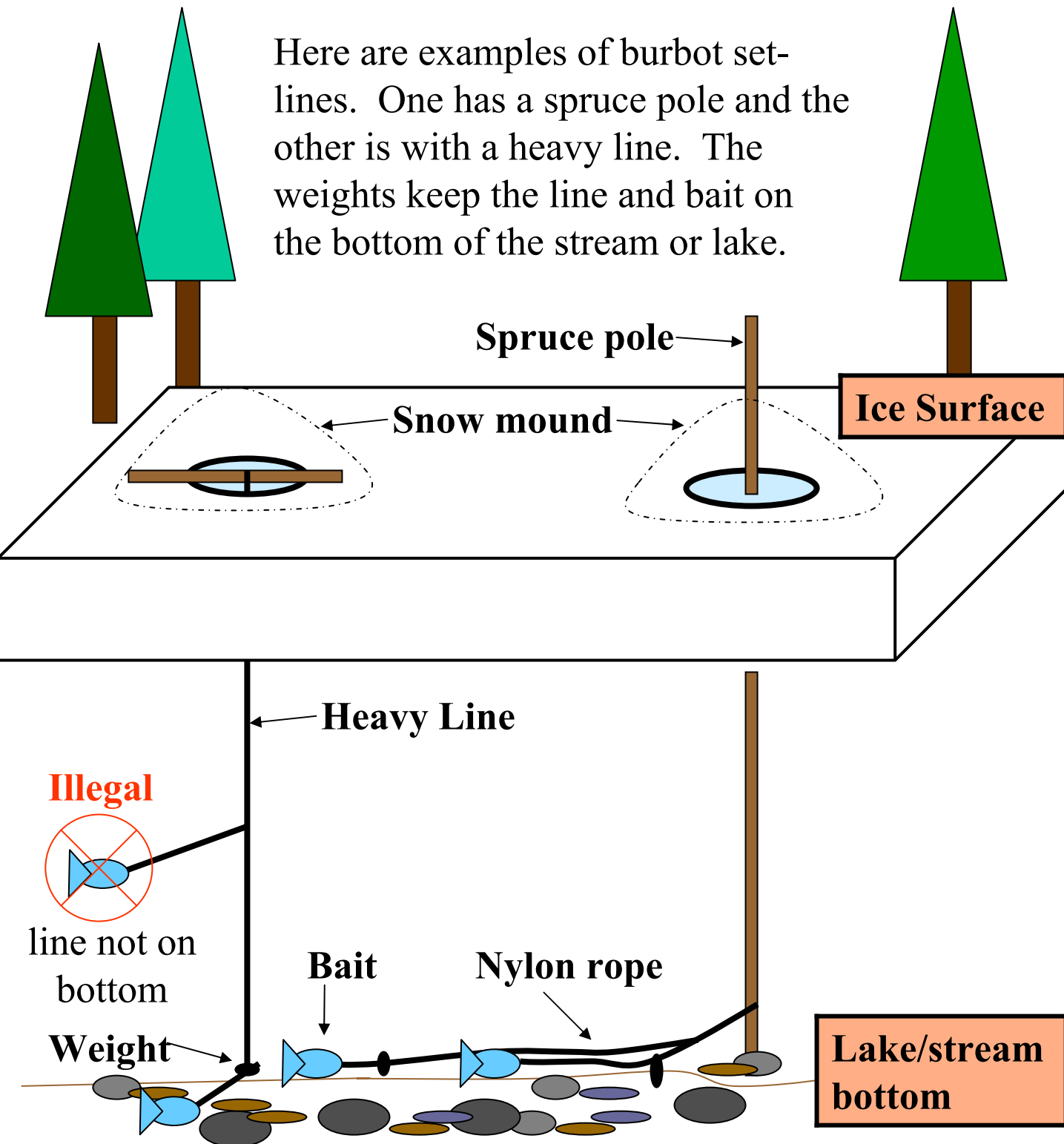


After your line is secure, pack a mound of snow over your hole (with no air leaks) to prevent the hole from freezing. Some people use twigs and sticks to provide stability for the pole and snow packed over the hole. Avoid using cardboard or foam over the hole because they can freeze into the ice. Usually a 12 inch minimum well packed snow mound works well. Some prefer to place flagging on the set to easily find it.



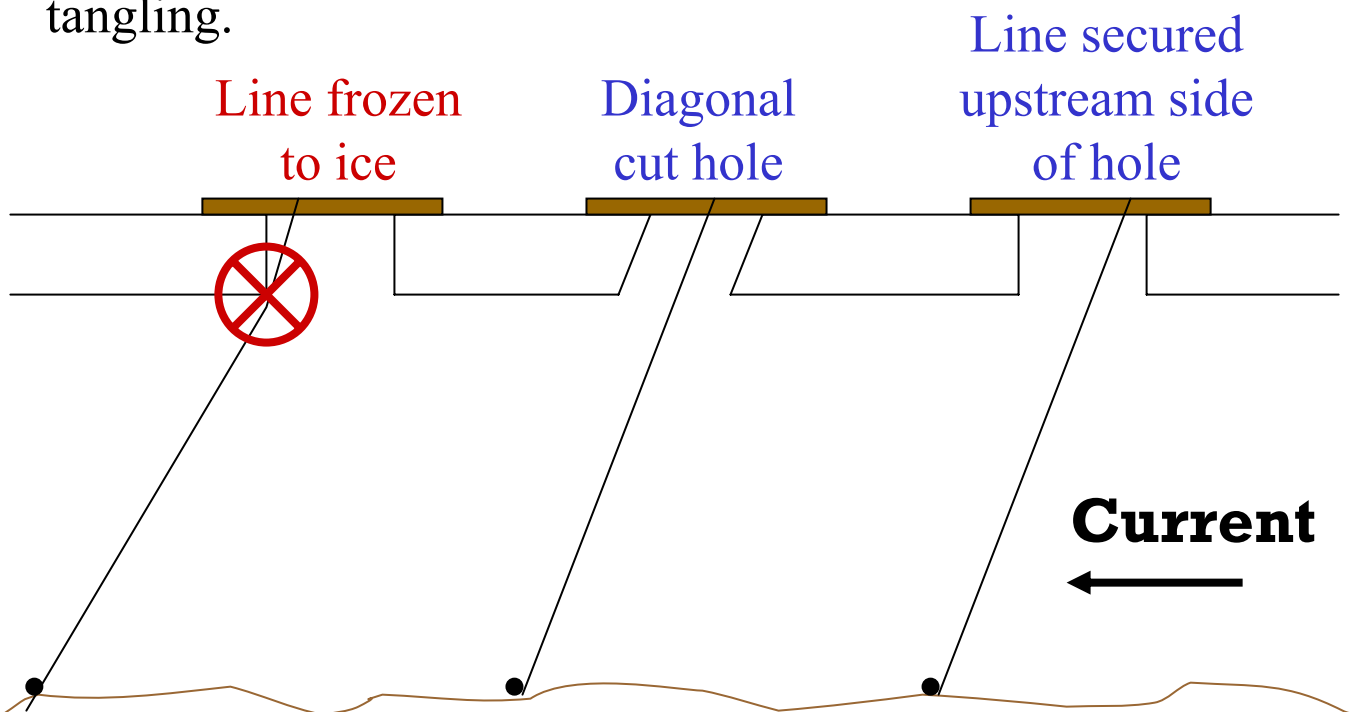
Set-Line Diagram

Here are examples of burbot set-lines. One has a spruce pole and the other is with a heavy line. The weights keep the line and bait on the bottom of the stream or lake.



Things to Keep in Mind

- Use fresh, sweet bait and change it often. Burbot are predacious fish and won't feed on rotten food. Bait that works well is herring, whitefish, smelt, and lamprey.
- Whitefish, herring, or other fish species without a bag limit or season may be used as bait. Other sport-caught fish may not be used as bait with the exception of the head, tail, fins, and viscera.
- It is illegal to use live fish as bait.
- When using a pole for your set-line, avoid using steel or aluminum because they conduct the cold much quicker than wood and will freeze the hole shut. Also, use spruce poles, not willow or birch, especially when beaver are present.
- Don't let your line freeze to the ice hole wall.
- Avoid using more than 2 hooks per set-line to avoid tangling.



When and Where Can You Catch Burbot During the Winter?



- ❖ The depth under the ice is not critical when choosing a set-line burbot site.
- ❖ Burbot can be taken in strong current.
- ❖ Mouths of sloughs tend to be good spots to set lines. Deep holes along bluffs are not always the best sites.
- ❖ Times that are good for catching burbot appear to be just before freeze-up until late December and start up again in mid January-February through break-up.

Statewide Burbot Set-Line Regulations

- The total aggregate number of hooks which may be used each day for set lines may not exceed the daily bag limit for burbot in the water being fished (e.g., if the daily bag limit is five burbot, then a total of five hooks may be fished each day). More than one hook may be attached to a set line.
- All hooks must be single hooks with a gap between point and shank larger than $\frac{3}{4}$ inch.
- Each hook must be set to rest on the bottom of the lake or stream.
- Each set must be labeled with the angler's name and address.
- Each set must be physically inspected at least once during each 24-hour period.

